

“Three in One: What Does that Mean?”

Isaiah 6: 1-8; Romans 8: 12-17

Today is Trinity Sunday:

Father, Son, Holy Spirit
Creator, Redeemer, Comforter

Both are expressions for the Trinity...which is a very central doctrine in our faith. For example, we would receive a member in our church from another denomination IF the person had been baptized by water and in the name of the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. So it is right up there in importance.

But, try to explain this doctrine and you only get more and more confused. Ultimately, the most astute and scholarly theologians, after writing about the nuances and details of the Trinity, declare that it is a mystery about the goodness and power of God.

There are some ways to look upon the Trinity and have some semblance of sense about it:

Water, for example, comes in three forms: Solid (ice); Liquid (which we drink) and Vapor (steam). It is still water but expressed in three ways each with their own function and purpose. Yet, still water.

Similar analogy with human beings: one can be a father, a husband, and a son. It is still the same person who functions in different ways depend on the context and the situation but maintain the same central values and ethics.

When you stop and think about it, the Trinity is really about family: God's family. It is a way for God to define God's self. One God, three persons, yet always the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Looking at the Trinity as God's Family might help us make some sense out of it. And the passage from Romans 8 lends itself to this approach. These verses are helpful in understanding the Trinity and understanding ourselves.

Paul is struggling to communicate to the early church about the tension between living according to the flesh and living according to the Spirit. Let's be clear what Paul means about living according to the flesh. Most of our western minds think sex when scripture talks about the flesh.

Yet Paul is far more general in scope and specific in theology. He is simply talking about people living in accord with the ways and morals of this world, of this society. Nothing sinister nor wayward nor illicit. Instead, he is warning people that there are two choices in life: according to the flesh OR according to the Spirit. According to personal and self-centered desires OR according to being there for others. According to my way and desires or according to God's way and desires.

Is not that often the case? Which way shall we live? It becomes a daily choice:

-am I going to fudge on my income taxes or be honest about them?

-Will I tell a little white lie or be honest about the situation?

-Will we jump on the band wagon protesting every time the government says something or will we be more open to finding the truth?

-Will I not talk about certain hot topics around certain people or express my thoughts in a thoughtful way.

-Will I cut in line for the exit off the interstate or keep my place in line?

-Will I malign someone who has offended me or deal with them up front and honestly?

We are regularly faced with making a choice. Will I or will I not?

Paul uses the notion of debtors - - meaning our obligation. To whom are we debtors? To whom are we obligated? In verse 12, he declares that we are not obligated to the flesh, but to the Spirit. He calls us to live by the Spirit and you will really live, but to live by the flesh means death.

Let's explore a little bit about what it means to live by the Spirit. Living by the Spirit enables us not to live by fear! I find lots of people living a life of fear. And I do not mean they are covering behind closed doors because someone is out to get them.

What I mean is people live out of fear...

- of a boss that could cost them their job
- of facing life head on and instead live an addicted life – either drugs or alcohol or we are a workaholic.
- of something bad is going to happen to them which is a hang up from a situation in their childhood or early adulthood.
- of life going too good and just a matter of time before it all comes crashing down.
- of parents who died at a certain age which they find themselves approaching.
- of not having enough money to support themselves in retirement for life.

It concerns me that so many of us live out of some kind of fear. Something will go wrong. Something will happen to me.

Rather that living out of a sense of confidence. A sense of assurance that we will make it. A sense of wondering about what life has in store for us.

I think living life fully by the Spirit is a life of confidence. And that confidence come from verse 14:

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

We are members of God's family. Our spiritual family is we belong to God and are children of God. We have a biological family here on earth, but we also have a spiritual family. And it is from that spiritual family that we gain confidence to be a child of God. One of the family members. We belong!

Just let that sink in...that we belong...we are someone...we are somebody...because we are children of God!

God called us. God made us. God loves us. God only desires the very best for us. God only wants us to be the very person we were meant to be!

It was a gift to me. My parents were always rooting for me. They were always supportive. When I would come up with a crazy idea, they would say, 'whatever you think is best, we're behind you.'

At one point I was considering going to Africa upon ordination to work in Christian Education in a foreign land. I had no clue what might happen. The funding for the project did not materialize so I told my parents I was not going to Africa but to another "foreign land" - Southwest Georgia. No offense to any natives of what became a wonderful five years for me. And then when I thought it was time to move, I said I was going to a place equidistant from Charlotte - - Stafford, VA. And every time they would say, 'what you want, we are behind you.'

Now, I have to admit that when I began to buy more properties and call home saying "I bought another house," there was some hesitancy on the other end of the line! They just did not want me to overextend.

Yet I had confidence because of their backing. They had my back. And through that I explored a number of various roles in my pastorates.

The same is true for you and me: God has our back. God declares, "Follow your call." God supports us regardless of what might happen. We are confident because of God's confidence in us.

That means Jesus is our brother. That means we are fellow heirs with Christ. Which means we have the inheritance. We have the promise. We have the assurance that we can follow our call and be blessed by God.

It does not mean that there will not be hard times. It does not mean we will not be disappointed. It does not mean that doors will be closed.

I've probably told this story. But I had a hankering for politics – which was pretty dumb on my part – but I had that hankering. I ran for public office twice: City Council while pastor in Sylvester, GA and School Board in Stafford, VA. I lost the first election by 5 votes and I lost the second election by 500 votes!! I

was a little slow to learn, but finally said, "Lord, I hear you..." yet each time, I was able to consider other calls and took them. Whereas if I had been elected, I would not have been able to follow what now was clearly God's will.

While I was deeply disappointed and embarrassed, I did survive and became open to another call. Yes, I got knocked down, but was able to get up and move on BECAUSE

-God had my back

-I am a child of God

-I did not need to fear

That's the gift we receive when we live by the Spirit. We are part of God's family. Jesus is our brother. God is our parent. The Holy Spirit is our daily companion. That's the Trinity. That's what makes sense to me about this doctrine.

And you? And South Plains Church? Are we individually and corporately living by the Spirit of God and able to call ourselves children of God? Are we confident that God has our back? Do we think God goes with us?

Well, you soon will be able to practice what we preach as a new Shepherd comes to lead you. To be able to include Laura and Naomi in this family of faith. To be able to live out of faith into a new future instead of out of fear. To be called Children of God. It will be a great way to practice what we believe in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. May it be so!